

Colonel John Franklin House,  
Athens Township, Pennsylvania

Berks Co.

HABS No. Pa. 226 -

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PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA  
District of Pennsylvania

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Ralph W. Lear, District Officer  
311-312 Dime Bank Bldg., Wilkes-Barre, Pa.

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COLONEL JOHN FRANKLIN HOUSE  
Athens Township, Bradford County, Pennsylvania

Present Owner

Nathaniel Flower Walker

Date of Erection

1796

Builder

Colonel John Franklin

Present Condition

Poor. Not remodeled to any great extent.

Number of Stories

Front wing is two stories high. Rear wing is of the one and one-half story type.

Materials of Construction

Frame constructed building, exterior is covered with siding. Front wing has pilasters on each corner. Joists and all other timber is white pine, as are the wide floor boards of random widths. Lathed and plastered on the interior.

COLONEL JOHN FRANKLIN HOUSE  
Athens Township, Bradford County, Pennsylvania

The Colonel John Franklin House was built in 1796, by Colonel Franklin. He lived there from 1796 until the time of his death in 1831. The house is now occupied by his great, great grand-son, Nathaniel Flower Walker.

Colonel Franklin is buried in a small burying plot on the grounds of the old home, on a little gravel bluff, overlooking the highway. He was eighty-one years old at the time of his death.

John Franklin was a native of Canaan, Litchfield County, Connecticut. Not long after removing to Wyoming, his wife died, leaving him with three small children; one, an infant of a week old. It is a well known story how he traveled the rough way to Connecticut, driving a cow in order to have milk for his children. In Connecticut, he placed them in the care of a friend.

After remaining many years a widower, Franklin married a widow, Mrs. Bidlack.

John Franklin, known to many and usually referred to, as "the hero of Wyoming" was probably the most ardent supporter of the Connecticut people, in their attempt to settle the land controversy existing between them and the Pennsylvania people, during the early days of the history of Wyoming.

For thirty years, he was the idol of the people, whose interests he especially espoused. As a public speaker, he could make no pretensions to eloquence; yet he rarely failed to command attention, for he exhibited a thorough knowledge of his subject; a surprising memory, day, dates, names; the purport of every document being stated by him, without referring to paper or note, with an accuracy rarely equalled. All through history, mention is particularly made of the very

retentive memory of Colonel Franklin.

During one of the laet bloody battles between the Yankees and the Pennamites, and after the attacking party had retired, Franklin seized the rifle of his friend, and swore thereon, a solemn oath, "That he would never lay down his arms until death should arrest his hand; or Patterson and Armstrong be expelled from Wyoming, and the people be restored to their rights of possession, and a legal trial guarantseed to every citizen by the conetitution, by justice, and by law/" This was no unmeaning ceremony, nor sudden impulse, but the delibratate, pregnant appeal to heaven, of a man of powerful mind, deeply impressed with the wrongs of his people and resolved to protect and avenge them.

Immediately after the garrison was withdrawn, and the people restored to their poessions, committees were appointed in the inter-regnum of law to regulate affairs in the settlement. Town meetings were informally called together and the militia was organized with a good deal of care, and led to a choice of officers. At a general parade in Shawney, Captain Franklin was elected to the command of the rsgiment and thereafter was called Colonel Franklin.

The first object of the eettlers was to obtain a trial for the right of soil. Petitions prepared to the Assembly of Connecticut, had been sent forward. Entries in his journal of letters written, intermixed with constant skirmishing, fighting and dying, show the earnestness with which Colonel Franklin devoted himself to the cause. The Connecticut Assembly finally passed a resolution to the effect that the settlers ought to have the advantage of a fair trial, and on March 6, 1785, Colonel Franklin set out for New York, as agent of the settlers.

In 1786, it was voted that John Franklin, among others and including General Ethan Allen, be appointed a committee to locate townships, and were also to inquire into the claims of all persons now settled at Wyoming.

During this year, Colonel Franklin, in the spirit of his oath on the bloody rifle, had aroused into action, some of the

boldest and most influential spirits in the land.

The Act of December, 1786, provided that Timothy Pickering, Zebulon Butler and John Franklin, notify the Electors that an election would be held to choose a Consellor, Member of Assembly, Sheriff, Coroner and Commissioners, on the first day of February.

Pickering was one of the most eminent men in the Union. Franklin, except in education and polish, was in no respect, the inferior of Pickering, and it was a wise, though as it proved, an unavailing stroke of policy, to endeavor to conciliate the great Yankee leader, by naming him as one of the Deputies to regulate the elections. Colonel Franklin was too deeply committed in interest and pledged faith to the grand scheme of establishing a new state, to take a new oath of fidelity to Pennsylvania and either directly by himself, or through the agency of his attached partizans, every obstacle short of absolute force, was interposed to prevent the election being held. And now, for the first time, was presented the spectacle of open and decided hostility among the Wyoming people.

Colonel Pickering came with assurance that on the introduction of laws, and the organization of the county by the election of proper officers, which implied the oath of allegiance, measure of compromise would forthwith be adopted. Probably three-fourths of the people were with him.

Franklin and a few others, especially the residents up the river, wished to defeat the election, insisting that confirmation of title to the settlers, should precede, and not to be left to follow, complete submission to the power of the State. The election was finally consummated, after a day of riotous commotion. Thus, Luzerne being politically organized, Courts established, and the laws introduced under Colonel Pickering; he proceeded to conciliate the good will of the people.

Franklin meanwhile, visited from town to town, from settlement to settlement, kindling by his burning zeal, the passions of his adherents to resist the laws, not by open violence, but by avoiding to commit themselves by taking the oath of allegiance; or participating in any measure that would seem to acknowledge

the jurisdiction of the State, unless a more liberal and specific law be enacted, to quiet the settlers in their lands.

At length, it was decided that the whole people should be called together to talk over the matter of common council. An attempt was made to strike Franklin while he was speaking, and wild disorder followed. A crisis was impending. A constitution and a new state was actually drawn up; the purpose being to wrest Wyoming and the old county of Weetmoreland from the jurisdiction of Pennsylvania, and establish a new and independent government.

Franklin and his party excited to still greater activity, continued to throw every obstruction in the way of the confirming law, and made the most spirited opposition to the laws being received and obeyed. A writ was obtained from Chief Justice McKean, to arrest John Franklin, on a charge of high treason. He was seized and taken first to Colonel Pickering's house, where he (Pickering) was compelled to interpose, and then to the jail at Philadelphia.

Immediate measures were adopted by the partizans of the Yankee leader to seize Colonel Pickering and carry him off as a hostage, for the safety of Franklin. An attempt was made, but Pickering escaped. After his return to Wilkes-Barre, the insurgents, deprived of the direction of their leader, Franklin, began to relent, and sent a petition to the Executive Council, acknowledging their offence, and asking pardon. This was granted.

During the early part of 1788, Pickering was again abducted by Franklin's men, who, during the nineteen days of absence from home, begged him to "intercede for our beloved Franklin." Pickering refused many times, but finally decided to intercede for their (the abductor's) pardon, if they would tell him the names of their leaders. They refused; finally they made one last request of him. They asked that he write a petition for them to the Executive Council. With this, Pickering complied.

John Franklin remained a good while in jail. At length, he was liberated on giving bond, with a large penalty; and

finally, all opposition to the government in Luzerne County, ceasing, he was fully discharged.

The end of 1788 found Luzerne prosperous; the laws of Pennsylvania in perfect operation; Franklin at liberty, and Pickering in his office, issuing writs and recording deeds.

Upon the release of Franklin from prison in 1789, he returned to Wilkes-Barre, but some months later removed to the new township of Athens, (at Tioga Point) which had been located and laid out in May, 1786, and of which Colonel Franklin was one of the original proprietors.

In 1792, Colonel Franklin was elected Sheriff of Luzerne County, and in 1795 and 1796, and in each of the years from 1799 to 1803, inclusive, he was elected a Representative from Luzerne County, to the Pennsylvania Legislature.

Craft- in his "History of Bradford County", says of Franklin:- "In the Legislature, on all those questions which related to the titles of lands, he was earnest in his defense of the half-share men; and unsparing in his reproaches and withering sarcasm of the land-jobbers. An attempt was made in the session of 1802-03 to expel him from the Assembly on account of his indictment under the Intrusion Law, but on account of political reasons, many in the land-holder's interest were induced to vote against his expulsion. Determined however, to get rid of him, the Legislature, in 1804, passed an Act dividing the County of Luzerne, and setting off to Lycoming, that part which contained the residence of Colonel Franklin.

In 1805, however, much to the chagrin of his enemies, he was elected by the people of Lycoming, and appeared in triumph at Lancaster (then the seat of the State Government) and took his seat in the Assembly. As it was his crowning, so it was his closing victory. Old age had dampened his ardor, and chilled his ambition, and he spent the remainder of his days in the quiet of his own home."

From-"Old Tioga Point and Early Athens", we receive this description: "Colonel Franklin had a very retentive memory. He could tell the events in their order, and with great

minuteness, which had occurred in the valley from the period of it's first occupation by the white people. He knew every man and his history, on the Susquehanna Company's Purchase, and the history of every tract of land, which had been occupied. In all questions relating to settlement or occupancy, his testimony was invaluable and conclusive.

Many of the depositions, where they could be obtained, have thrown great light on our early history. He was a ready writer; in writing his letters, in writing the history of the Purchase, in making copies of legal papers and documents, in keeping a journal, the amount of writing was enormous.

He was earnest in his convictions, and ardent in maintaining them. It is said that, as respects the great principles on which real estate is held in this country, his knowledge has been unsurpassed.

Athens has been called a Connecticut town, and it has been carelessly said that title prevailed generally, except in one case, but careful investigation proves that while 319 acres were patented to applicants under Connecticut title on the Lockhart warrant, these patents were to only eleven persons, and only six of those were original Connecticut proprietors. John Franklin was among these.

From the time of his last sitting in the Legislature, in 1805, Franklin seems to have dropped completely out of sight. He had not attained his sixtieth year when he stepped aside. Possibly, chagrin at the defeat of the Connecticut claim, as a whole, had some influence over him. He showed his persistency only in neglecting or avoiding application for a Pennsylvania title to his home east of the Susquehanna, in Athens, and at least, a small tribute-----that as long as he lived, his title was never called in question.

It is not strange that toward the close of his life, his active brain gave way. He was ever in fear of seeming pursuers, and often became violently excited in his imaginary encounters with his enemies. At this time, for a number of years, he was tenderly cared for, by his old comrade, Daniel Moore.



Colonel Franklin died a poor man, a pitiful fact perhaps, however, unknown to him, for the old accounts still in existence, show that for ten years previous to his death, the necessities of life were furnished to him by the merchants of the vicinity, entirely on credit.

April 15, 1834, was advertised "Public Auction of Property of John and Abigail Franklin". The home property was bought by the executors, Sam Ovenshire, and Amos Franklin.

One of Colonel Franklin's descendents, Amos, son of Billa, (Franklin's daughter) married Cynthia McKinney, and while he relinquished the old home, it is a curious fact that his daughter Rebecca, became the wife of Zephon F. Walker, who had inherited the Colonel Franklin home from his uncle, Nathaniel F. Flower; thus the old home came once again into the hands of Colonel Franklin's family. In 1796, it was listed in the List of Taxables at \$1490.00 valuation."

The Colonel Franklin house is a frame constructed building, with stone foundation walls. The building is a typical farmhouse type; L shape in plan. The front wing is two stories high with an unfinished attic. The rear wing is of the story and one-half type, with rooms on each floor.

The exterior is covered with siding and the front wing has pilasters on each corner. The cornice is rather heavy, and is not very well proportioned. The original roof was wood shingle. On the front elevation is a simple porch, which shelters the front entrance of simple design.

This building is in rather poor condition. It is in great need of repairs and painting.

The house is constructed with large posts, approximately eight inches square, with intermediate four inch studs spaced about three feet apart. The joists and all other timber is white pine, as are the wide floor boards of random widths.

The building is lathed and plastered on the interior, and some of this is in very poor condition.

Entering the front door, you arrive into a center hall, from which stairs of simple design take you to the second floor.

To the right of the first floor hall, is the living room, and a small office, which was originally the parlor. This office has a small alcove with large windows. This has been added. To the left of the hall was the dining room and a small bed room.

On the second floor of the front wing, there is a center hall, and three bed rooms.

In the rear wing of the first floor, there was originally, a large dining room and kitchen, and several small store rooms. In both the kitchen and dining room, there are doors entering off the side porch. In this rear wing was a chimney and fireplaces opening into the dining room and kitchen. The fire places had mantels of simple design, but at present, the fireplaces are closed.

Historic material obtained from: "History of Bradford County"-Crane. "Old Tioga Point and Early Athens"-from Tioga Point Museum and Library. "History of Wyoming Valley"-Miner. Nathaniel F. Walker.

Author.....

Approved.....

Date.....

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